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# THE ABDICATION OF MAN.

BY ELIZABETH BISLAND.

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IN the midst of the excursions and alarums of war and preparation for war a sudden and great silence has fallen upon the everlasting discussion of the relations of the sexes. Before the stern realities of that final and bloody argument of Republics as well as Kings further dissection of the Woman Question has been deferred. The most vociferous of the "unquiet sex" have been regarding respectfully the sudden transformation of the plain, unromantic man who went patiently to business every morning in a cable car, and sat on a stool at a desk, or weighed tea, or measured ribbon, into a hero ready to face violent annihilations before which even her imagination recoils. The grim realisms of life and death have made the realism of such erstwhile burning dramas as *The Doll House* shrink into the triviality of a drama fit only for wooden puppets. Sudden and violent readjustments of ideas are apt to be brought about when human relations are jarred into their true place by the thunder of cannon. War legitimizes man's claim to superiority. When the sword is drawn he is forced to again mount that ancient seat of rule from which he has only recently been evicted: or rather from which he has himself stepped down. The democracy of sex at once becomes ridiculous—the old feudal relation reasserts itself.

It is interesting to note that there has not been one feminine voice raised to protest against the situation. The entire sex, as represented in this country, has, as one woman, fallen simply and gladly into the old place of nurse, of binder of wounds, of soother and helpmeet. Not one has claimed the woman's equal right to face villainous saltpetre, or risk dismemberment by harbor mines.

I believe this to be because woman prefers this old relation.

I believe that if man were willing she would always maintain it; that it depends upon him whether she returns to it permanently or not. I believe that her modern attitude is not of her own choosing—that man has thrust that attitude upon her. For the oldest of all empires is that of man; no royal house is so ancient as his. The Emperors of Japan are parvenus of the vulgarest modernity in comparison, and the claims of long descent of every sovereign in Europe shrivel into absurdity beside the magnificent antiquity of this potentate. Since the very beginning of things, when our hairy progenitors fought for mastery with the megatherium, and scratched pictorial epics upon his victim's bones, the House of Man has reigned and ruled, descending in an unbroken line from father to son in direct male descent. His legitimacy was always beyond dispute; his divine right to rule was not even questioned, and was buttressed against possible criticism not only by the universal concurrence of all religious and philosophic opinion, but by the joyful loyalty of the whole body of his female subjects. Moses and Zoroaster, St. Paul and Plato all bore witness to his supremacy, and the jury of women brought in a unanimous verdict in his favor without calling for testimony.

Women yet living can recall a day when they forgot their pain for joy that a man-child—heir to that famous line of Kings—was born into the world. They can remember a time when their own greatest claim to consideration rested upon the fact that they were capable of perpetuating the royal race. They recollect a period when even from his cradle the boy was set apart to be served with that special reverence reserved for those whose brows are bound with the sacred circlet of sovereignty—when a particular divinity did hedge even the meanest male; a tenfold essence being shed about all those who were of the tribe of Levi

Why then—since all this is of so recent existence, since man's rule was founded so deep on woman's loyalty—has he been swelling the melancholy ranks of Kings in Exile? For that he has ceased to reign over woman does not require even to be asserted. It is self-evident.

When was this amazing revolution effected? Who led the emeute that thrust man from his throne? It is a revolt without a history; without the record of a single battle. Not even a barricade can be set up to its credit, and yet no more important

revolution can be found in the pages of the oldest chronicles. So venerable, so deep-rooted in the eternal verities seemed the authority of man over woman that the female mind, until the present day, never doubted its inevitableness. Indeed, as is the case with all loyal natures, she was jealous for the absolutism of her master, and was quick to repair any such small omissions as he himself might have made in the completeness of his domination. All of her sex were trained from their earliest infancy to strive for but one end—to make themselves pleasing to their rulers. Success in the court of man was the end and aim of their existence, the only path for their ambition, and no other courtiers ever rivaled these in the subtle completeness of their flattery. Man's despotism, of course, like all other tyrannies, was tempered by his weaknesses, but while woman wheedled and flattered and secretly bent him to her projects she did not question his real right to govern.

Here and there through the past there arose a few scattered pioneers in recalcitrance. One of the first to deny the innate supremacy of the male was a woman who herself wore a crown. Elizabeth Tudor had a fashion of laying heavy hands upon her rightful lords whenever they displeased her, and she appears to have rejected the whole theory of feminine subordination. John Knox—strong in the power of the priest, whose sublimated prerogatives man had skillfully retained in his own hands—could and did dominate Mary Stuart even upon the throne, but when he blew from Geneva his “First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Woman,” and called all the ages to witness that the rule of a female was an affront to nature, that trenchant lady who held the English sceptre forbade him ever to set foot in her domains.

Elizabeth, however, was a unique personality and had few imitators. The literature of her day abounds with expressions of supreme humility and loyalty from the one sex to the other. Elizabethan poets deigned to play at captivity and subjection to the overwhelming charms of Saccharissa and her sisters, and turned pretty phrases about her cruelty, but this was merely poetic license of expression. All serious, unaffected expression of conviction, such as was to be found in the religious writings of the time, and in the voluminous private correspondence which gives us the most accurate description obtainable of the real actions and

opinions of our ancestors, never suggested a doubt of man's natural and inalienable superiority, mental, moral, and physical. So undisturbed was this conviction down almost to our own day, that the heresy of Mary Wollstonecraft gave the severest of shocks to her own generation. So heinous seemed her offense of *lésé-majés* in questioning man's divine right that one of the most famous of her contemporaries did not hesitate to stigmatize her as "a hyena in petticoats."

History gives us but one record of a general outbreak. In the 13th Century the Crusades had so drained Europe of its able-bodied men that the women were forced to apply themselves to the abandoned trades and neglected professions. They shortly became so intoxicated by the sense of their own competency and power that when the weary wearers of the cross returned from the East they were at first delighted to discover that their affairs were prospering almost as well as ever, and then amazed and disgusted to find the women reluctant to yield up to their natural rulers these usurped privileges. Stern measures were necessary to oust them. Severe laws were enacted against the admission of women into the Guilds—the labor organizations which at that period governed all the avenues of industrial advancement; and the doors of the professions were peremptorily slammed in the women's faces. Such episodes as these, however, were detached and accidental. Female treason never dared unrebuked to lift its horrid head until within the present generation.

The emancipated new woman has various methods of accounting for the humbling of this hoary sovereignty. Some find it only a natural concomitant of the general wreck of thrones and monarchical privilege—in other words, that it is but one phase of advancing democracy. By some it is supposed that in this Age of Interrogation man's supremacy, along with all other institutions, has been called upon to produce an adequate reason for being, and having no answer that seems satisfactory, he has been summarily forced to abandon pretensions which rested merely upon use and wont. It is said by some that woman has been examining with coldly unprejudiced eye the claim of man to rule, has been measuring his powers against her own and has not been daunted by the comparison. The more noisy declare that she has stripped him of his royal robe and that, like Louis XIV. minus his high heels and towering peruke, she finds him only of medium

stature after all; that she has turned the rays of a cynical democracy upon the mystery encompassing his Kingship and refuses to be awed by what she sees there; that it is because of this she begins to usurp his privileges, thrust herself into his professions, shoulder him even from the altar, and brazenly seating herself on the throne beside him she lifts the circlet from his brows to try if it be not a fit for her own head.

The weakness of all such explanations is that they do not take into account the fact that woman is not by nature democratic. Whatever political principles the occasional or exceptional woman may profess, the average woman is in all her predilections intensely aristocratic; is by nature loyal, idealistic, an idolator and a hero worshiper. Strong as the spirit of democracy may be, it could not by itself alone in one generation change the nature of woman. The explanation must lie elsewhere.

In the language of a now famous arraignment—"J'accuse" man himself.

No ruler is ever really dethroned by his subjects. No hand but his own ever takes the crown from his head. No agency but his can wash the chrism from his brow. It is his own abdication that drives him from power—abdication of his duties, his obligations, his opportunities. Ceasing to rule, he ceases to reign. When he ceases to lead he wants for followers, and the revolt which casts him from power is only the outward manifestation of his previous abdication of the inward or spiritual grace of kingship. When man ceased to govern, woman was not long in throwing off the sham of subjection that remained.

Like other subjects, woman required of her master two things—*panem et circenses*, bread and circuses. When the industrial changes brought about by the introduction of machinery put an end to the old patriarchal system of home manufactures, man found it less easy to provide for his woman-kind—more especially his collateral woman-kind—and without any very manifest reluctance he turned her out into the world to shift for herself. Here was a shock to her faith and loyalty! The all-powerful male admitted his inability to provide for these sisters, cousins, aunts, and more distant kin who had looked up to him as the fount of existence, and had toiled and fed contentedly under his roof, yielding to him obedience as the natural provider and master. Woman went away sorrowful and—very thoughtful.

This alone was not enough to quite alienate her faith, however, Woman was still, as always, a creature of imagination—dazzled by color, by pomp, by fanfaronade. A creature of romance, adoring the picturesque, yielding her heart to courage, to power, to daring and endurance—all the sterner virtues which she herself lacked. The man of the past was often brutal to her—overbearing always, cruel at times, but he fascinated her by his masterfulness and his splendor. She might go fine, but he would still be the finer bird. When she thought of him she was hypnotized by a memory of gold, a waving of purple, a glitter of steel, a flutter of scarlet. He knew that this admiration of hers for beauty and color was as old as the world. From primordial periods the male has recognized this need of the female. The fish in the sea, the reptile in the dust, the bird in the forest, the wild beast in the jungle are all aware of their mates' passion for gleaming scales, for glowing plumes, for dappled hides and orgulous crests of hair. They know, they have always known, that no king can reign without splendor. Only man, bent solely upon his own comfort and, it would seem, upon the abandonment of his power, deliberately sets himself against this need of the female, which has become imbedded in her nature through every successive step up in the scale of evolution. He alone fatuously prides himself on the dark, bifurcated simplicity of his attire; intended only for warmth and ease and constructed with a calculated avoidance of adornment. To avoid criticism he has set up a theory that a superior sort of masculinity is demonstrated by the dark tint and unbeautiful shape of garments; (as if the fighting man, the soldier—who is nothing if not masculine—were not always a colorful creature;) and chooses to ignore or resent woman's weakness for this same gold-laced combatant, and the silken, picturesque actor.

"*Paccuse*" the man of abandoning his mastership and becoming a bourgeois in appearance and manner through a slothful desire for ease. There can hardly be a question that Louis le Grand's red heels and majestic peruke were uncomfortable and a bore, but his sense of humor and knowledge of men were such that his bed curtains were never untucked until his lion's mane had been passed in to him on the end of a walking stick, and was safely in its place. He could imagine how unimposing the King of Beasts might be in *negligé*. He knew that to be revered

one must be imposing. Louis the unfortunate found it far less tedious to abandon stateliness and work wigless and leather-aproned at his locksmith's forge, while his feather-headed queen played at being a dairy-maid at Trianon, forgetting that the populace, which had submitted humbly to the bitter exactions of the man who dazzled them, seeing the bald head and leathern apron would get abruptly up from its knees and say: "What! submit to the pretensions of a locksmith and a dairy-maid—common folk like ourselves—certainly not!" and proceed to carry their sovereign's suggestion of equality to the distressingly logical conclusion to be found at the mouth of the guillotine.

*"J'accuse"* man of carrying further this democracy of sex by adding rigid plainness of behavior to ugliness of appearance, forgetting that a woman, like the child and the savage, love pomp of manner as well as of garment, and that what she does not see she finds it hard to believe. Every wise lover soon learns that it is necessary to reinforce the tenderness of his manner by definite assurances of affection several times in every twenty-four hours. Then, and then only is a woman sure she is loved.

How can she believe man heroic unless he use the appearance and manner of the hero?

Sir Hilary of Agincourt, returning from France, found his lady from home, and he and all his weary men-at-arms sat there—mailed cap-a-pie—throughout the entire night until she returned to welcome them home and receive their homage. What if at other times Sir Hilary may have been something of a brute?—Lady Hilary, flattered by this fine piece of steel clad swagger, would, remembering it, forgive a thousand failures of temper or courtesy.

When El Ahmed held the pass all through the darkness while his women fled across the desert, and his foes feared to come to hand grips with him, not knowing he stood there dead, propped against the spear he had thrust into his mortal wound to hold himself erect—there was no female revolt against the domination of men who were capable of deeds that so fired women's imaginations.

These may, after all, seem to be frivolous accusations—that men do not dress well; do not behave dramatically; but the signification of these seemingly capricious charges lies deeper than may appear. Man has been seized with a democratic ideal, and



after applying it to political institutions has attempted to carry it into domestic application. He is relentlessly forcing a democracy of sex upon woman ; industrially, mentally, and sentimentally. He refuses to gratify her imagination ; he insists upon her development of that logical selfishness which underlies all democracy, and which is foreign to her nature. Now, nature has inexorably laid upon woman a certain share of the work that must be done in the world. In the course of ages humanity adjusted itself to its shared labors by developing the relation of master and defender, of dependent and loyal vassal. Sentiment had adorned it with a thousand graces and robbed the feudal relation of most of its hardships. Mutual responsibilities and mutual duties were cheerfully accepted.

Woman was obliged to perform certain duties, and these could only be made easy and agreeable by sentiment, by unselfishness. Man needed her ministrations as much as she needed his. He realized that sentiment was necessary to her happiness and he accepted the duty of preserving that sentiment of loyalty and admiration for himself which made her hard tasks seem easy when performed for a beloved master. He took upon himself that difficult task of being a hero to a person even more intimate than his valet. He took the trouble to please woman's imagination.

The hard democracy of to-day will take no note of the relation of master and dependent. Each individual has all the rights which do not come violently in contact with other's rights, and has no duties which are not regulated by the law. Unselfishness is not contemplated in its scheme. Every individual has a right to all the goods of life he can get.

Women are beginning to accept these stern theories ; beginning to apply the cruel logic of individualism. So far from the power to win his favor being her one hope of advancement or success she does not hesitate to say on occasion that to yield to his affections is likely to hamper her in the race for fame or achievement. So far from giving an heir to his greatness being the highest possibility of her existence, she sometimes complains that such duties are an unfair demand upon her energies, which she wishes to devote exclusively to her own ends.

The universal unpopularity of domestic service proves that the duties of a woman are in themselves neither agreeable nor

interesting. Where is the man in all the world who would exchange even the most laborious of his occupations for his wife's daily existence? The only considerations that can permanently reconcile human beings to unattractive labors is first the sentiment of loyalty—that such labors are performed for one who is loved and admired—and second the fine, noble old habit of submission. These incentives to duty, these helps to happiness, man has taken from woman by weakly shuffling off his mastership.

I accuse man of having willfully cast from him the noblest crown in the world—of having wrongfully abdicated. War has at least this merit that it forces him to drop the vulgar careless ease of the bourgeois and resume for the time at least those bold and vigorous virtues which made him woman's hero and cheerfully accepted master.

ELIZABETH BISLAND.